

## **Gardasil Vaccine Protects Against Cervical Cancer**

02/12/07

What would it be worth to you to know that your daughter, your mother, your sister, or your aunt was protected against cervical cancer? The American Cancer Society estimates that last year more 9,700 women in the United States were diagnosed with cervical cancer and 3,700 women died of the disease. Yet, now a simple vaccination can protect girls and women against cervical cancer.

Gardasil vaccine was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in June 2006. It is given in a three dose series over a period of six months, and is designed to offer protection before a girl or woman becomes sexually active. It is licensed for use in girls and women age 9 to 26 years old.

The vaccine protects against four types of HPV, or human papilloma virus, that are responsible for 70% of all cervical cancers and 90% of all cases of genital warts.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the U.S. Approximately 20 million Americans are currently infected, and each year there are 6.2 million new infections. Half of those new infections will be found in adolescents and young adults aged 15 to 24.

The symptoms of HPV vary from mild to severe. Some people will not develop any symptoms. Others will develop warts in the area of exposure, which may require medical treatment. The most serious symptom is cervical cancer, caused by some types of HPV.

The Gardasil vaccine is now available at no cost through Missouri's VFC program for girls on Medicaid, or without medical insurance. For those who do not qualify for the VFC program, the vaccine can also be purchased from area physicians and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department. Contact the Westside Public Health Center at (417) 874-1220 to make an appointment. The vaccination cost for those not eligible for VFC vaccine is \$135.00 per dose.

While Gardasil is an important step forward in the fight against cervical cancer, women should also continue to receive regular screenings and Pap tests.